

PROCESSED
OCT 2 1998
GTU LIBRARY

Light

...
on a New World

*Published for the
Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia (Dawn Fellowship)
by*



*Light Bible Publications,
PO Box 760
Bexley, Kent
DA5 1UB, Great Britain*

E-Mail: Light.magazine@dial.pipex.com

Editor: Colin Dryland

Technical Editor: Roy Hinkly

Correspondence Secretary: John Lowe

Publications Secretary: John Cordial

VOLUME FIFTEEN

NUMBER 10

JULY/AUGUST 1998

CONTENTS

Parables of the Kingdom	page 1
Correspondence	page 9
In the Footsteps of Christ (7)	page 11
News & Views	page 17
Cover Picture	page 18
Bible Truths v Popular Christianity	page 19

Parables of the Kingdom

The Wheat and Tares

DURING HIS PUBLIC ministry, Jesus frequently travelled through the countryside of his native land. He became acquainted with those natural sequences of *'seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter,'* [Genesis 8.22] which had been part of God's promise to Noah centuries previously. With his spiritually enhanced intellect he perceived in these natural phenomena the basis for many powerful spiritual lessons for his followers in every age. Following on from the parable of the sower and his seed, the next parable or story, was told to the *'great multitudes'* who were gathered there. Jesus related how the kingdom of heaven was like to a man sowing good seed in his field, but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares or weeds among the wheat and went his way. Subsequently it became clear that whilst the wheat was growing to bring forth fruit, so also were the tares appearing. The householder's servants inquired of the useless growth and should they go and eliminate the tares? *'No'* came the reply, *'lest while you gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat with them.'* Both were to remain and grow until the harvest, then first the tares were to be gathered, bundled and burnt, and afterwards the wheat was to be gathered into his barn. [Paraphrase Matthew 13.24-30]

THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION

Later on in the house the disciples asked Jesus for an explanation of the parable

and this is contained in Matthew chapter 13. With his guidance we too can learn much in terms of spiritual values and teaching when we reflect upon the Master's words. The parables set out in unmistakable terms, the respective identity, experiences and destinies of two classes of individuals during the period prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God.



A field of wheat showing the tares growing among it in the foreground.

‘THE WHEAT’ CLASS

Jesus himself was the sower of the good seed. This seed represented the glorious knowledge concerning the Gospel (Good News) of the Kingdom of which he was preaching, and which truth was being implanted into the hearts and minds of ‘*the children of the kingdom.*’ [verse 38] Safely lodged there, that seed of knowledge and joyous anticipation (of the Kingdom) could grow and prosper, and finally bring forth the desired fruit. The seed was being sown bountifully by the testimony of Jesus and later the process was to be continued by the apostles who went out into all the world (‘*The field*’) and proclaimed the same Gospel message of the coming Kingdom. Indeed, there were to be signs following [Mark 16.17] in support of their preaching. The growing period for ‘*the children of the kingdom*’ was elsewhere described by the Apostle Peter when he wrote ‘*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*’ [1

Peter 2.2] or again '**grow** in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' [2 Peter 3.18] The children of the Kingdom were to be in the world but not of it. Their manner of life and growth, was to be based on '*...whatsoever things are true...honest...just...pure...lovely...of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*' [Philippians 4.8,9]

What desirable characteristics these are, for they can bring forth '*...fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*' [Romans 6.22,23] What a destiny indeed!

'THE TARES' CLASS

This plant, this weed, is of a very different natural species. As Jesus said of that class represented by the tares, they '*are the children of the wicked (one).*' [Matthew 13.38] That seed is sown by the devil [verse 39] which refers to all those evil propensities which are so latent in the human heart.¹ These can lead on to so many of the grosser sins such as blasphemy, lust, greed, envy and many other forms of wickedness as defined in the Scriptures. Whilst figuratively speaking, this class as seeds have shared in the good things that God has provided such as rain, sunshine, food and many other blessings, yet in the majority of cases they are '*...lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, (without self-control) fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.*' [2 Timothy 3.2-4]



Wheat and a Tare (Darnel)
The two grow together but the tares cannot be removed until the harvest.

¹ For a fuller explanation of the meaning of the devil see article entitled 'The Devil and Satan' on page 19.

But, as the parable indicated, this evil class of mankind was to 'grow' alongside and often in the midst of the righteous '*children of the kingdom.*' Indeed, as opportunity has permitted over the succeeding centuries, some of these evil ones have risen to great political, religious and military power and persecuted and even hated '*the children of the kingdom.*'

ENMITY BETWEEN THE TWO CLASSES

Through the ages subsequent to the utterance of the parable the righteous class have so often come into moral and spiritual conflict with the evil class. The growth and wicked influence of the latter has greatly affected the righteous ones. The persecution, the cruel taunts etc., have played their part in sometimes eroding or destroying their faith, their steadfastness and their obedience to the Gospel call. In the intervening years of man's dominion even the very source of nutriment for their faith, the Bible, has been criticised, challenged and even copies of this precious Book have been destroyed by the '*wicked (one).*' [Matthew 13.38]

The '*children of the kingdom*' have therefore been subjected to this enmity, this hindrance to growth, this diminution of faith, this barrage of scepticism and this attack on their spiritual values. This situation is designed by God to test their spiritual stamina, their resistance to evil and their recognition that as the Apostle Paul put it '*in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing*' [Romans 7.18] yet in God they could place their trust.

For them, spiritual life, survival and obedience to Divine commands and precepts has resulted in frequent encounters with wickedness. Yet curiously this is designed to improve and strengthen their growth, their resistance to evil and the bringing forth of '*the fruit of righteousness,*' [James 3.18] so desired by the sower of the seed.

The Apostle Paul found:

'...a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.'
[Romans 7.21-25]

As Jesus also found in his experiences, the suffering and the cross must come before the crown. He too *'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'* [Hebrews 4.15] He triumphed over all the sinful weaknesses to which mortal nature is so prone and so we read: *'God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'* [Philippians 2.9-11]

The faithful children of the kingdom have recognised the outworking of the principles of endurance, faithfulness and submission in their lives, and have accepted the words of Paul when he wrote: *'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness (N.I.V. 'harvest of righteousness') unto them which are exercised thereby.'* [Hebrews 12.11]

'WHILE MEN SLEPT'

This phrase introduces a new element into the teaching of the parable, for it was during this situation that the seeds of the tares or weeds had been planted. Surely this idea is designed to indicate that there have been and still are those men, or ministers who could have been and indeed should have been the guardians of the principles of truth expressed in the Gospel message. Since the days of Jesus, these groups have instead been spiritually either *'asleep'* or *'unaware'* of the growth of error, false doctrine or practice in the field of Christianity. Could these *'men who slept'* be identified with the various leaders, ministers and other religious authorities that have allowed, if not directly promulgated, much teaching and practice in the Christian world which is so contrary to the clear teaching and doctrine of the Holy Scriptures? Thanks be to God who has preserved a small minority to proclaim **'The Truth'** of the Gospel of salvation and of the Kingdom so soon to be established on the earth.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE WITH THE TARES?

In the parable, the householder's servants had asked him if they should gather up the tares. [verse 28] This they were not to do, for both wheat and tares were to grow until the harvest. The roots of both were in the field (the world) and were unavoidably and inextricably intertwined. To remove the tares might hinder or

destroy the tender wheat growth. The offer of the servants spoke of their anxiety for the tender wheat plants, surrounded as they were by the strongly growing tares. But the time of segregation was not yet; the presence of the wicked ones (the tares class) at this point in the development of the wheat class, was necessary in order to test the ability of the latter class to survive. Prospective saints have to resist the overtures and advances of present sinners.

THE TIME OF HARVEST

By this time, as Jesus told the parable, the minds of the many listeners would be able to visualise fields of wheat stretching far away into the distance, a beautiful golden hue and with all the prospect of a bountiful harvest. Despite the curse imposed from the beginning, and the ever present *'Thorns and thistles'*, [Genesis 3.18] the divinely promised harvest had arrived. The householder studied the bountiful scene and considered the 'time' was ripe for the harvest. Perhaps, if he was a spiritually minded man, he might recall the words of Jeremiah: *'we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey.'* [Jeremiah 41.8] Then again, as he looked across the golden field, he may well have reflected on the damaging work of his enemies in the words of Job who had declared *'Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle (original Hebrew means noisome weeds) instead of barley.'* [Job 31.40] But the time had come, the matter could be delayed no longer and the harvest was ready. The great witness to the existence and controlling power of God was evidenced as the Apostle Paul was later to declare: *'Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.'* [Acts 14.17]

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TARES

Confident of the ability of his reapers to discern the difference, the word came forth *'Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.'* [Matthew 13.30] To whom was the instruction issued? To the disciples afterwards, Jesus indicated the identity of the divinely appointed reapers, *'The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire...'* [Matthew 13.41,42] The parabolic teaching was reaching its climax. Jesus now took to himself a new role, he is **both** sower and reaper, and

his angelic messengers were now to go forth at the time of harvest and remove and destroy all the human elements that make up the tares class of every age.

This divinely appointed work of cleansing and destruction is one of the necessary stages in the great harvest of the earth and in the preparation of its people for the Kingdom which is to be established.

THE ROLE OF THE ANGELS

Concerning the part to be executed by the angels in the great work ahead, we recall the Psalmist's words: *'Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.'* [Psalm 103.20,21] Their punitive role is further described *'Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.'* [Psalm 104.4]

The goodness of God in His daily provision for mankind will change where necessary, to His severity upon all that 'offend' – the original Greek is *'skandalon'* or 'a stumbling block'. The figure has changed but the implication is obvious and far-reaching. Elsewhere, Jesus said: *'whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.'* [Matthew 18.6] It will be with unerring divinely controlled precision that the members of the tares class will be rooted out and destroyed when Christ comes to establish his Kingdom. Their figurative end is fittingly described as a *'furnace of fire'* and *'wailing and gnashing of teeth.'* [Matthew 13.42] For them, the pastoral scene so beautifully depicted in the parable turns to fiery indignation and destruction at the hands of the angelic agents.

This aspect of their work completed, then the role of these mighty beings dramatically changes.

THE WHEAT GATHERED IN

It was the Psalmist who declared with the utmost confidence in God's purpose: *'Our God shall come...a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to*

the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. [Psalm 50.3-5]

Yes, their individual sacrifice of praise, worship, obedience and faithfulness every day of their life of opportunity, will commend the saints elect to Jesus and his Father. For the righteous of every age, by their gaining of the great reward that has been offered, there will stretch forward the endless ages of immortal existence. Jesus promised: *'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'* [Matthew 13.43]

The prophetic pictures of the blessed state of those who will be chosen to be with Jesus in his Kingdom are numerous indeed, and are the subject of frequent articles in this magazine. For their faithfulness amidst error, their steadfastness in times of trial and temptation, their uprightness in times of doubt and dispute, *'the children of the kingdom'* will receive their great reward. If they have died, the fundamental Bible doctrine of the resurrection from the dead will be theirs to experience. For those who are living at the time when the great harvest is gathered, there will be the joy and satisfaction of seeing Jesus, the one they have loved, served and obeyed all their lives. Together, the great illustrious immortalised throng of the redeemed from amongst men and women will live to serve the great Creator and His Son Jesus throughout the ages of eternity.

Such is the wondrous destiny that awaits the *'children of the kingdom'*. [Matthew 13.38]

Will it be yours as well?

Jesus said *'Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.'* [Matthew 13.43]

Geoff Atkinson
Bognor Regis, West Sussex

CORRESPONDENCE

Following the article entitled 'The Flood of Noah's Day, (Volume 15 Number 3), a reader has raised a number of points which the author Mr J Reid, has examined. As a result he has revised his remarks and clarified the passage concerned. A reply has been sent to the correspondent and the substance of this is published below for the benefit of our readership.

The passage in question is as follows:

Genesis Chapter 1 verses 7 & 8 (AV)

'And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which (were) under the firmament from the waters which (were) above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.'

Genesis Chapter 1 verses 7 & 8 (NIV)

"So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse "sky". And there was evening, and there was morning - the second day.'

In the article Mr Reid stated on page 10, *'This firmament must have been a large expanse of water. Then the waters under heaven were gathered in one place and became seas.'*

On reflection he agrees this cannot be the case. It was an expanse that would have contained air to enable God's subsequent creation to survive on earth.

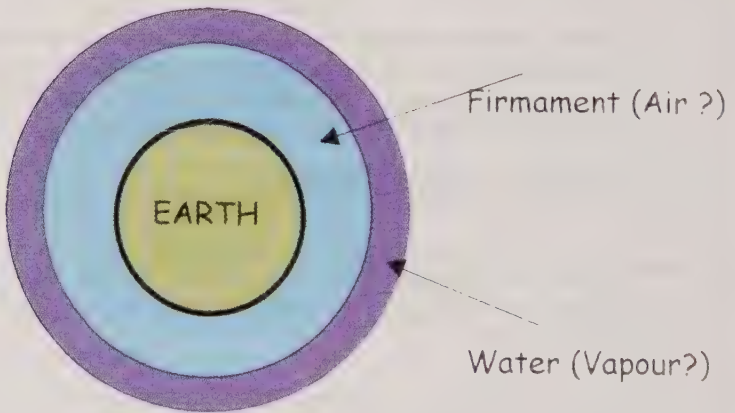
The original Hebrew word 'raqiya' is considered by those versed in the language, to mean that it was solid and supporting the waters above it. In that sense trapped air can support weight and perhaps that is the best way to understand the meaning of the firmament.

In the NIV passage the translators have chosen the word 'sky' to describe the firmament but the author is unhappy with that choice of word as he feels that the term 'sky' describes somewhere far beyond the planet earth.

On page 11, the following passage appears, '*We believe that the firmament above was an extremely thick layer of water vapour that had significant implications for understanding the earth's original climate.*'

Our correspondent correctly pointed out that this should have read '*We believe that above the firmament there was etc, etc.*'

To clarify the point we have shown this in the following diagram.



John Lowe
Correspondence Secretary

In the Footsteps of Christ (7)

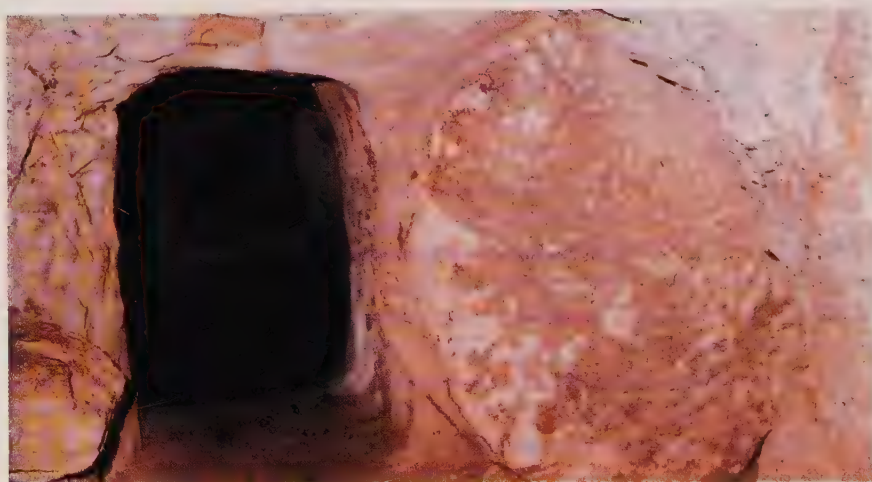
IN THE LAST article we considered the culmination of Christ's work on this earth as he gave himself, a sacrifice for sin upon the cross. Whilst those around the cross mocked and jeered as Jesus' life ebbed away, we remember his promise to the repentant thief of a place in God's kingdom.

As Jesus hung on the cross an extraordinary event took place. Suddenly the sky began to get dark at midday. Darkness covered the scene during his last few hours of agony. This miraculous sign from God overshadowed the earth and must have given Jesus a little comfort from the burning heat of the midday sun.

Afterwards as his life ebbed away, Jesus communed with his Father in prayer, uttering the words '*It is finished*' and having prayed for forgiveness for his murderers, his life came to an end.

The Jews meanwhile, were anxious that the bodies of Jesus and those two crucified criminals should not remain on the cross on a holy day and orders were given to the soldiers to break the legs of the three men who hung there to hasten their death. But Jesus was already dead and the soldiers marvelled, since crucifixion was generally a long lingering death, sometimes taking up to two days. To ensure that he was dead, a soldier took a spear and pierced the side of Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy written hundreds of years beforehand. [*Zechariah 12.10*] There was therefore no doubt that Jesus was dead.

Normally the bodies of executed criminals would have been thrown over the wall of Jerusalem into the fires of '*Gehenna*' (a Greek word for the valley of Hinnom which is translated '*hell*' in the A.V.) to be consumed. Joseph of Arimathaea went in the evening to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. Having been granted his request, he wrapped the body in linen and placed it in his own new tomb, hewn out of rock.



A tomb similar to the one in which Jesus was buried. The above example is in Nazareth

A DISASTROUS END?

God's purpose seemed to have failed with the death of Jesus. The one who held himself out to be the Messiah of Israel was now dead and buried. The hopes of the disciples were dashed to pieces and they would have left the crucifixion scene in total disarray and despair. Their work over the last three years had now evaporated, together with their ambition to reign with him over the kingdom of God. Can we imagine their bewilderment at this time?

Those who Jesus had healed and even raised from the dead during his ministry, would have no lasting benefit, since ultimately they would die and so Jesus' work had on the surface accomplished little for them. Even his words would be regarded as the words of an imposter and would carry no weight. The Jews who had killed him would be celebrating their victory with joy as for them, life could now carry on as normal. To make sure that Jesus' body could not be stolen in an attempt to say that he was risen from the dead, guards were posted outside the tomb where the body of Jesus rested.

The Sabbath drew on and no doubt there were many heavy hearts as the Passover feast and the Sabbath were kept by the followers of Christ.

THE RESURRECTION MORNING

Because of the timing of Jesus' death, adequate preparation for the anointing of his body in the usual custom, had not taken place. We can visualise the two Marys who were anxious to carry out this task as soon as they could after the Sabbath. No doubt they spent a sleepless night preparing for the first light of day when they would visit the tomb and perform the last loving act for their Lord. As it began to dawn we can imagine these two women approaching the tomb, wondering how they were going to roll away the huge stone which sealed the entrance to the cave.

But their desire to be first at the tomb was not realised, since God had determined to raise His beloved Son, the Son in whom He was well pleased. Jesus had given his whole life as an act of supreme love for his Father, who now would play His part and raise His Son at the first opportunity. Yes, the Father had a yearning to see His sinless Son alive again. The greatest miracle of all was marked by a great earthquake as the angel of God rolled back the huge stone which sealed the entrance to the tomb. [Matthew 28.2]

The guards witnessed this terrifying scene described in Matthew's account: '*His (the angel's) countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.*' [Matthew 28.3,4]

The women arrived on the scene, devastated at first to find the stone rolled away. Entering the tomb they saw an angel in a long white garment, who told them of the resurrection of their Lord. They were commanded to tell the disciples and especially Peter, that Jesus had risen and would go into Galilee where they would see him.

THE DISCIPLES' UNBELIEF

The Bible narrative tells us about Jesus appearing to Peter, also how Mary carried the good news and arrived at the place where the disciples were met, and of the total disbelief of the rest of the disciples. They could not accept their words. Possibly they thought it might be a trick so that the authorities could round up the rest of the disciples to put them to death as well.

Instead of a joyous occasion it had turned into one of fear and perplexity. But news of the empty tomb had reached the authorities, who were dumbfounded at this turn of events. The keepers were bribed to say that the disciples had stolen

the body whilst they slept. But if they were sleeping, how would they know that the disciples stole the body? Anyone could have taken it.

We know that all the evidence points to the great Truth that Jesus had certainly risen from the dead and appeared to all the disciples. Later, he took them to task for their hardness of heart and unbelief. He also appeared to two of his followers as they journeyed to Emmaus, sadly talking of the death of Jesus and the end of their hopes. Jesus joined them along the way and asked them concerning their sadness, receiving the answer that it was on account of what had happened to Jesus:

‘And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him...Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.’ [Luke 24.18-21]

They poured their hearts out to Jesus, telling him about the accounts of his body missing from the tomb and the reports of him being alive again.

‘O FOOLS, AND SLOW OF HEART’

What was the reply of Jesus ?

‘O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?’ [Luke 24.25,26]

Then using the Old Testament books of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets, Jesus opened their eyes to the scriptures, showing what his death and resurrection had accomplished. Later they admitted that their hearts burned within them whilst he opened up the scriptures. When talking with them, he had not made himself known to them and their eyes were unable to see who this stranger was telling them these things. God’s plan, right from the fall in Eden, centred around the sacrifice of a descendant of Eve, the condemnation of sin and the triumph over sin by Jesus. In this way he became the firstfruits from the dead, opening up the way to eternal life.

We know that after his resurrection he appeared to his followers as a man with flesh and bones and this is how he described himself to his disciples. He ate with them and showed that he was no apparition, but the real Christ, now raised to

Spirit nature. When the doubting Thomas finally met Jesus, he was invited to touch him and feel his wounds and was convinced that indeed his Lord had risen. [John 20.19-29]

For the next forty days Jesus remained with his disciples and he appeared to many witnesses, a number of whom wrote the Gospel accounts and the Epistles. Even historians of the day, such as the Jewish writer Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus, leave us with accounts of Jesus, who cannot be written out of history.

Jesus then gave his disciples the commission to go into all the world and to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to all men and women saying:

'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' [Mark 16.16]

THE ASCENSION

The Old Testament prophecies do not end with the death and resurrection of Jesus but require him firstly to ascend into heaven and then to return to the earth to set up the kingdom of God, the Kingdom which was the subject of Jesus' preaching.

One of the Psalms, written 1,000 years before the birth of Christ foretold this event:

'The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.' [Psalm 110.1]

Jesus therefore was now to ascend into heaven and the prospect for the disciples of the setting up of the kingdom of God immediately, was again dashed.

The record in Acts tells us how the disciples asked Jesus if he would set up the Kingdom at that time. He replied that they were not to know the times or the seasons which God has in His own power. [Acts 1.6-8] They were assured of power, after Jesus' resurrection, for Jesus had promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit and that they would be his witnesses throughout the world.

The final glimpse of Jesus which the disciples had and which we too can share, is of his footsteps leading them to the mount of Olives where they watched in awe as Jesus was taken up from them into heaven. Then a cloud enveloped him,

taking him out of their sight. We can picture them there, open mouthed, as two angels appeared and said to them *'...why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'* [Acts 1.11]

The disciples returned to Jerusalem and thus commenced the Apostolic era. The Spirit gifts were poured out on them on the day of Pentecost as Jesus had promised. Then they commenced the work of preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God throughout the Roman world.

THE RETURN OF JESUS

The disciples were filled with joy as they preached the Word with conviction and waited for the day of his return. Today we are still waiting for that great day when the feet of Jesus will once again be upon the earth. The Apostle Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and told them:

'He (God) shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.' [Acts 3.20,21]

The prophets of old give us the assurance as we await the return of Christ: *'And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives...'* [Zechariah 14.4]

The last book of the Bible also gives us the assurance of the fulfilment of the Divine plan centred in Jesus. *'The kingdoms of this world are (to) become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'* [Revelation 11.15]

In this series, we have in a sense followed in the footsteps of Jesus, in his ministry, then to the cross and afterwards to the glory of that resurrection morning. Will you today truly follow in his footsteps as his disciples did so long ago, that **you** may enter into the kingdom of God in that future day when he returns?

'Even so, come Lord Jesus.' [Revelation 22.20]

Clive Brooks
Horsham, West Sussex

HOW MANY TIMES have you seen and heard news about the activities of the '**Truth and Reconciliation Commission**' in the Republic of South Africa? The object of this body which is chaired by the former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is to allow a forum where those who have been suspected of past crimes during those terrible years of apartheid, can come and tell the **truth** about their part in the tragedies and ask for forgiveness, all in the hope of **reconciliation** of the past divisions among the people of that country.

The meaning of **reconciliation** is 'to restore or bring back to friendship or union' or 'to bring to agreement.' It is not surprising to find that **truth** and **reconciliation** are words found in the Bible, where a little study will show us that **truth** and **reconciliation** are central to God's purpose with mankind. The Apostle Paul wrote '*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has **reconciled**.*' [Col.1.21 NKJV]

Like the situation in South Africa, there is a great rift or division between God and man that has to be faced up to. We also need the courage to face up to the **truth** and seek **reconciliation**. In our case, Jesus Christ has been appointed by God to carry out this process, as he said:

'I am the way, the **truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' [John 14.6 NKJV]

The way is there to follow and as the Apostle Paul said, he and the other apostles had been 'commissioned' by God to put in hand the process:

'Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of **reconciliation**.' [2 Cor.5.18 NKJV]

We hope the South African people will succeed in their efforts to reconcile their differences. More importantly, we would ask our readers:

Are you seeking **truth**? Are you seeking the forgiveness and **reconciliation** offered to you through Jesus Christ?

Ken Dennis
Dartford, Kent

COVER PICTURE

THE WARM DAYS of summer are here again in England. Our changing seasons are a blessing from God which demonstrate His creative power and the certainty of his promises. One of those promises was made after the great flood which destroyed the world in which Noah lived some 4,500 years ago. God promised Noah that He would never do this again and He said to Noah: *'While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'* [Genesis 8.22]

The cover picture confirms the truth of these words. It shows a typical English cornfield, reminding us of the approach of harvest time when the farmer can gather in the sun-ripened grain and reap the reward for his efforts. The farmer must exercise patience until the time of harvest arrives.

Patience is a virtue which is not easy to acquire - most of us have to admit that we lack patience at times. Many of us live in a fast moving world of instant communications and better living standards. Our needs and desires can be satisfied quickly - there is no need to wait for anything and we become impatient when things don't quite match up to expectations. The things of this life may look attractive but where do they lead us in the end? Nowhere. The Apostle James condemned those who trusted in this world's goods and the so-called pleasures of this life which so many seek for today. [James 5.1-5] He reminded his readers of the need for patience just like the farmer who waits for the time of harvest:

'... Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it... Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' [James 5.7-8]

The day of Christ's coming is described in the Bible as the time of harvest. The teaching of Jesus in the parable of the wheat and tares (page 1) reminds us of the need to prepare ourselves for that time when those who have been obedient to God's requirements and have exercised patience, will receive the reward of their labours.

Bible Truths v Popular Christianity

The Devil and Satan

IN CONSIDERING MODERN theological teaching on the subject of the 'Devil and Satan', we need look no further than any leading Bible dictionary. It becomes immediately apparent that popular theology treats 'Satan' and the 'Devil' as the same personified being whose motives encompass all that is opposed to God. As confirmation of this, we quote the following statements from the Davies Bible Dictionary:

Under the heading '*Devil*' we read:

'An Evil Spirit...

The Evil One, Satan the greatest of all fallen spirits...

He is the great enemy of God and Man who tempted Christ and incites men to sin...

He is that old serpent that tempted Eve, a liar and the father of lies...'

Similarly under the heading '*Satan*' we read:

'The Devil, pre-eminently 'the adversary', because animated by a disposition hostile to all goodness and the Chief opponent of God and man, aiming to undo the work of God...In the fully revealed doctrine of Satan, which is seen in the New Testament he is the god of this world who has access to the hearts of men, deceives them, and receives their witting or unwitting obedience...'

The would-be Bible student undoubtedly sees this as the accepted theological view and may be confused when the same dictionary also states under the heading of Satan:

'He is however, under the control of God. Only by God's permission can he pursue his malicious designs. When permission is granted him to carry out his evil plots, it is only that he may become an instrument in furthering the divine plan...'

Apparently there is confusion in the conventional theological view since *'The greatest of the fallen Spirits, the Chief opponent of God'* can only carry out his *'oppositions or malicious designs'* when he has been granted God's permission.

We make no attempt to clarify the mysteries of this theological riddle, but note the divine principle of scriptural interpretation as laid down in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

'...God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...'
[1 Corinthians 14.33]

Adopting this principle, that scripture is not confusing and by not holding to any preconceived ideas, the true Bible teaching about the *'Devil'* and *'Satan'* is readily understood. Furthermore, we would add that it is essential that a follower of Christ has a correct understanding of these Bible words. Without such a knowledge it would not be possible to appreciate the purpose of Christ's mission.



An unknown artist's impression of the 'Devil' or 'Satan' of popular theology.

This is clearly stated in the first letter of John:

‘...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.’ [1 John 3.8]

PERSONIFICATION IN BIBLE TEACHING

In turning to the Bible then, to find its teaching about the words ‘Devil’ and ‘Satan’, it is necessary first to note the way in which personification is often used throughout the Scriptures. By this we mean the way that inanimate objects are often personalised, partly as a characteristic of the language in which the Bible was written and also to convey a more meaningful impression. For example in the book of Proverbs, the attribute of wisdom is likened to a woman:

‘She (wisdom) is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.’ [Proverbs 3.15]

In John’s Gospel record the Spirit or power of God is given a personality:

‘Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.’ [John 16.13]

This promise of Jesus was fulfilled when the power of God was bestowed on the apostles. In the book of Acts this is referred to as ‘*It*’ [Acts 2.2,3] and is not personalised.

Scripture has many other examples of such figures of speech, but these will suffice. In considering biblical teaching on the ‘Devil’ and ‘Satan’ we should ensure then that such figures of speech where used, do not cloud our perception.

MEANING OF THE WORD SATAN

In order to understand the use of the words ‘Satan’ and ‘Devil’ in scripture it is essential that we understand their correct meaning. Firstly the word ‘Satan’ has been taken directly out of the original Hebrew of the Old Testament without translation, and when translated simply means ‘Adversary.’ Here the biblical translators have used a certain amount of theological licence. In certain instances where it suited their belief they have translated the word ‘Satan’ as ‘adversary.’

For example in the first book of Kings we read:

'And the LORD stirred up an **adversary** unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite.' [1 Kings 11.14]

Here the word **adversary** is the word '*Satan*.' We can see that following the accepted theological view, it would be contradictory for God to stir up '*Satan*' against Solomon. What we can perceive in the translation is that to be a '*Satan*', doesn't necessarily infer wickedness or sin. For instance, if someone opposes or is adverse to someone doing wrong, then the **adversary** or '*Satan*' would not be evil. Scripture leaves us in no doubt on this point as we see from the following illustrations.

In the book of Numbers we read of the prophet Baalam who was hired by an enemy of Israel, Balak the King of the Moabites to prophesy against Israel. God warned Baalam not to do this but Baalam continued to ignore this injunction and we read:

'... God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an **adversary** (the original Hebrew is Satan) against him.' [Numbers 22.22]

We notice in this passage that the angel which carried out God's work is referred to as '*Satan*.' To leave no doubt that the word '*Satan*' does not refer to any '*Chief*' evil spirit, we have the account in the first book of Chronicles, where God himself is referred to as '*Satan*'. We read:

'And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.' [1 Chronicles 21.1]

In the parallel account of this incident in the second book of Samuel we are told:

'And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and **he** moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.' [2 Samuel 24.1]

We can see from these references alone that the word '*Satan*' carries no connotation of an evil or wicked person, but simply means **adversary**. It is

interesting to note that in the Old Testament which comprises nearly three quarters of the Bible and covers some 4,000 years of God's dealings with the human race, no connection is made between this word '*Satan*' as a fallen spirit, angel or supernatural being. What is more, apart from the first two chapters of Job, there are only three direct references to the word '*Satan*'. At the same time Israel were continually being reprimanded for their sin. If such a supernatural being or '*Chief*' evil spirit was responsible for sin, it is quite remarkable that no reference is made to it.

MEANING OF THE WORD DEVIL

When we turn to the word '*Devil*' (singular) we find a different meaning, and a term that cannot be applied to anything righteous. Again the word is not a translation of the original language but is derived from the Greek '*diabolos*', or '*diaballein*'. '*Dia*' meaning across and '*ballein*' to throw. When translated into English it literally means to '*falsely accuse*' or to '*slander*'. Again, if we refer to a Bible concordance we can see the theological licence of the translators, at times translating the word as '*slanderer*' or '*false accuser*' where the preconceived notion of a '*Devil*' as an evil spirit clearly doesn't fit. For example in his letter to Titus, speaking of the way the older women were to set an example to the younger women, the Apostle Paul wrote:

'The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not **false accusers** (original Greek is Diabolos or Devils), not given to much wine, teachers of good things.' [Titus 2.3]

Similarly we read in Paul's first letter to Timothy, referring to the wives of leaders in the house of God:

'Even so must their wives be grave, not **slanderers** (Diabolos or Devils), sober, faithful in all things.' [1 Timothy 3.11]

We note in both cases that the theological notion of the '*Devil*' would not fit, particularly as the emphasis is on the women personally being '*Devils*', that is not being possessed by an external supernatural influence.

We have seen then that in both cases, the words '*Satan*' and '*Devil*' in themselves give us no indication as to what precisely or who is being referred

to. This is learnt from other considerations in the text, where in most cases the particular **adversary** or **slanderer** is apparent. For instance Jesus said to the Apostle Peter: *'Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me.'* [Matthew 16.23] Here Peter was the adversary ('Satan') for in his love for Jesus he wanted to oppose his death, which was adverse to Christ's mission. On a different occasion Jesus said to his disciples: *'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?'* [John 6.70] Here Judas Iscariot is referred to, who would lead the crowd of **false accusers** ('devils') to betray Christ and bring about his death.

As in the previous verses considered, when no preconceived idea of a personified 'Chief' evil spirit is in the mind of the reader, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest one and the context of the passage confirms this. What then of other verses which appear to associate the terms 'Devil' or 'Satan' with a supernatural power linked with sin? For example, consider the words from the first letter of John which we partly quoted earlier:

'He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.' [1 John 3.8]

Jesus who was manifested to destroy the works of the 'devil' was himself affected by this power for we read in Luke:

'And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost (Spirit) returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil...' [Luke 4.1,2]

THE CAUSE OF TEMPTATION

The same power is referred to in this chapter as 'Satan' and in the end of the account we read that this power of temptation (the 'Devil') *'...departed from him for a season.'* [Luke 4.13] In considering verses like these, in order to determine what is really being implied by this apparent power of the 'Devil' and 'Satan' there is a very important characteristic that must be considered. Only human beings, that is flesh and blood can be affected by this tempting power, for concerning the nature of God we read in the epistle of James:

'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God **cannot be tempted** with evil, neither tempteth he any man.' [*James 1.13*]

This point is emphasised in the life of Christ, in that he was made of our nature, so that he could feel the effects of this tempting power and suffer its consequences in death, unlike God or the Angels. This theme is clearly shown in the letter to the Hebrews where we read:

'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour (help) them that are tempted.' [*Hebrews 2.16-18*]

Jesus was tempted like us as a consequence of taking on 'the seed of Abraham.' He was born of a woman and consequently was under the law of sin, as we read in Hebrews chapter four:

'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' [*Hebrews 4.15*]

THE POWER OF SIN

It is the feeling of our infirmities, that is our natural characteristics of flesh and blood, which make us susceptible to the power of temptation and which is shown to be the '*Devil*'.

'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Jesus) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' [*Hebrews 2.14*]

This passage identifies the '*Devil*' as that which holds the power of death. What is this then? Scripture leaves us in no doubt:

‘The wages of **sin** is death...’ [*Romans 6.23*]

‘**sin**, when it is finished, bringeth forth death...’ [*James 1.15*]

‘The sting of death is **sin**...’ [*1 Corinthians 15.56*]

‘Wherefore, as by one man **sin** entered into the world, and death by **sin**; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.’
[*Romans 5.12*]

Yes, Scripture is clear, that which holds the power of death is sin. Death is the consequence of **sin** and it is this which Christ came to take away or destroy by condemning it in the only way possible, that is in his own natural body. For this, as we have already shown, is where the power of temptation comes from. The importance of Christ’s sacrifice can now be seen:

‘...but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.’ [*Hebrews 9.26*]

‘Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...’
[*1 Peter 2.24*]

‘For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and (by a sacrifice) for sin, condemned sin in the flesh’.
[*Romans 8.3 - Compare with Hebrews 2.14*]

THE CONFLICT WITHIN US

Even by comparing this last verse with those of Hebrews referred to earlier, it is abundantly clear that the natural weakness which besets each one of us and causes us to fall under temptation to sin, is the ‘*Devil*’. It is human weakness that dwells within each of us, which the Bible describes as ‘*sin in the flesh*’.

James clearly recognised that this tendency to sin was not as the result of any external agency but clearly came from within, for he tells us:

‘...every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.’ [*James 1.14,15*]

The Apostle Paul was very aware of this conflict between the spiritual mind and the adversary that naturally dwelt within him, for he wrote to the believers at Rome:

‘For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not...I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.’ [*Romans 7.18,21-23*]

And so it is that Paul exhorts his readers:

‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof’ [*Romans 6.12*]

There has never been a place in the Bible for an external supernatural person or force being responsible for the sins of mankind. This responsibility has always been placed clearly on man, from the introduction of sin by Adam’s disobedience as recorded in Genesis, to the present day. Jesus told his disciples:

‘For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man.’ [*Matthew 15.19,20*]

Man has always had the freewill to obey or disobey God, as He instructed Cain:

‘If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door...’ [*Genesis 4.7*]

We know what choice man has made and this is confirmed by Scripture:

‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.’ [*Romans 5.12*]

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST’S SACRIFICE

We have established that the Scriptures do not support the notion of a personal ‘Devil’ or ‘Satan’. Indeed to uphold such a doctrine removes man’s

responsibility for his own sin, and negates the need for Christ to be of our nature, thereby making of no effect his sacrifice in death. If sin's nature, the 'Devil', does not dwell in our flesh, and more importantly did not dwell in Christ's flesh, how then could he have condemned it by the sacrifice of his body on the cross? But the Scriptures show what has happened, and we marvel that:

‘...as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.’ [*Romans 5.19*]

God has demonstrated His love for us by opening the way to life through His Son’s great sacrifice and triumph over sin in the flesh. We too can be accounted righteous if like the Apostle Paul, we persevere in our struggle against our natural desires and try to overcome the power of sin which lies within each of us. Paul wrote to Titus:

‘For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.’ [*Titus 2.11-14*]

Peter Webb
Maidstone, Kent

The Christadelphians
(Dawn Fellowship)
believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments)
to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God.
Its principal theme is the salvation of mankind through the saving work
of the Lord Jesus Christ and the setting up of the kingdom of God
under his rulership when he returns to the earth.

*

LIGHT on a New World is published to provide
a better understanding of this true Christian hope
and the Correspondence Secretary will be pleased to arrange for the
magazine to be posted to any address on request.

*

The Christadelphians are very willing
to answer questions about Bible teaching
either privately or in the pages of LIGHT
and correspondence will be welcomed.

E-Mail: Light.magazine@dial.pipex.com

*

Please send your questions to:
The Correspondence Secretary, Light Bible Publications,
PO Box 760, Bexley, Kent DA5 1UB, Great Britain

*

Information about public meetings arranged
by the Christadelphians in particular areas and the names
of the nearest Christadelphian representatives
can be supplied by the publishers on request.

*

Light Bible Publications can also supply the following books:

THINE IS THE KINGDOM
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Details available upon request.

*

The Lowfield Printing Company, Crayford, Kent

